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ABSTRACT

Africa was unable to fulfill the objectives of making compulsory primary education available for all by 1980. As a result, the Harare (Zimbabwe) Declaration, signed by ministers of the United Nations members states of Africa in 1982, aimed to make primary schooling universal and to promote literacy among young people and adults on a massive scale. To be addressed on national and regional levels are these six priority areas: (1) preparation and implementation of strategies to help nations prepare regional workshops, a national plan, structures to support the plan, technical support, and a national seminar; (2) action research to promote literacy among women, educational innovations, use of African national languages, and a definition of education programs adapted to the living conditions of rural populations; (3) staff training; (4) production and distribution of teaching material; (5) exchanges and information; and (6) public awareness and mobilization of public opinion. More than 40 national operational projects are being implemented with the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Among the projects are the COFORPA program (regional technical cooperation for educational planning and administration), a project promoting the use of the Arabic alphabet in the elimination of illiteracy, and the IFOMA (Innovation-Training-Teaching Materials) project for teacher education. (CML)

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LITERACY LESSONS



INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

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Regional Programme for the Eradication of Illiteracy in Africa

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In the last two decades the African countries have made considerable efforts to develop their education systems. The substantial growth in the number of schoolchildren, which occurred in Africa in the 1960s at all levels of education, including primary education, continued in the 1970s and into the 1980s.

Among the current Member States of Unesco in sub-Saharan Africa, the gross enrolment rate in primary schooling, which indicates the potential intake of the system in relation to the population concerned, rose from 38% in 1960 to 79% in 1980. The rate of illiteracy among the population aged 15 years and over meanwhile fell from 70.6% in 1970 to 60.6% in 1980.

Despite these results, achieved in particularly difficult circumstances at a time of limited and shrinking financial resources, declining economic output and very strong population growth, Africa has been unable to fulfil the objectives advocated in 1961 by the Conference of Education Ministers in Addis Ababa, according to which compulsory primary education for all should be available in African countries by 1980.

As a result, the Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers responsible for economic planning of the Member States of Africa, which was held in Harare (Zimbabwe) from 28 June to 3 July 1982, concluded its proceedings by unanimously adopting the Harare Declaration, which stressed the need for the African countries to prepare and implement educational policies 'geared to the objectives of economic and social development, (...) and designed in particular to eliminate illiteracy through a vigorous, sustained campaign to universalize primary schooling for children and to promote literacy among young people and

adults on a massive scale'. In the same declaration, the Conference called on Unesco particularly 'to examine the possibility of implementing, in co-operation with Member States, a regional programme for the eradication of illiteracy'.

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STRATEGIES: CHARACTERISTICS, MECHANISM AND STRUCTURES

● *Characteristics*

The strategy advocated by the Harare Conference to eliminate illiteracy is designed to 'universalize primary schooling for children and to promote literacy among young people and adults on a massive scale'. The Regional Programme for the Eradication of Illiteracy supports and coordinates this dual approach.

The strategy is based on three considerations. The first of these is that, even if a country manages to make all its young people and adults literate, the task would need to be endlessly repeated unless new generations were all given access to a standard of education which would take them at least to the stage of lasting literacy. The second consideration is that, conversely, a country which managed to universalize access to primary education, without undertaking an energetic campaign to promote adult literacy, would in fact be delaying the elimination of illiteracy by the number of decades it would take for a fully educated generation to reach old age. For the whole of that period, therefore, it would be foregoing the benefit of the improved potential of its working population. The third consideration is of a more qualitative nature, and is related to the positive effect of adult literacy and post-literacy on improving the relevance and effectiveness of primary education. Literate parents can facilitate efforts to educate child-

ren and renovate primary education in two ways: on the one hand they can provide an environment which is more amenable to educational innovations and better able to grasp the specific purpose of primary schooling aimed at fostering community development, while on the other hand, in the case of functional literacy, literate parents themselves are more amenable to the implementation of local economic and social development projects. From the point of view of progress, in other words, the community will constitute an environment which is more receptive to the integration of young people who have been through equally functional primary education.

The strategy set out in the regional programme thus leads to the establishment of comprehensive plans, which operationally combine converging objectives, complementary structures and resources implemented for their full employment.

Literacy schemes are usually restricted to the services involved in adult literacy programmes. The approach advocated by the regional programme, on the other hand, goes beyond these limitations and covers all the other services concerned with educational problems, such as primary education departments, educational planning units, the services in charge of preparing contents and methods, etc. The approach of the programme is thus interdisciplinary, appealing as it does to co-operation between specialists in the fields of primary education, literacy and other types of education, and other specialists in the fields of the social sciences, planning and educational administration.

The emphasis on relevance which underlies the proposed programme in any case implies due consideration for social conditions and the needs of local populations. It also means that planned activities must contribute towards the improvement of living conditions, self-fulfilment and the general progress of the societies for which they are intended.

● *Mechanisms and structures*

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In view of the national and regional dimensions of the programme, operating *mechanisms and structures* have been established to allow communication and consultation, thus ensuring both regional and national coordination of the programme.

Six priority areas have been selected, for which activities are to be implemented on both national and regional levels. These areas of activity concern:

- *preparation and implementation of strategies;*
- *action research;*
- *staff training;*
- *production and distribution of teaching material;*
- *exchanges and information;*
- *public awareness and the mobilization of public opinion.*

Regional mechanisms and structures: a technical secretariat has been set up within the framework of the Unesco Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA). This secretariat is responsible for supplying whatever services are required by the programme, as well as for information exchange and liaison with other programmes of the Organization, such as the Network of Educational Innovation for Development in Africa (NEIDA) and with national bodies taking part in the regional programme.

The technical secretariat of the programme includes one full working group and one restricted working group, whose activities are coordinated by a programme specialist. The restricted working group, which includes experts in literacy and adult education, primary education and educational planning, is responsible for permanently supervising the implementation of regional programme activities. The full working group also includes other specialists of the BREDA programme, who are in some way concerned with the

implementation of the regional programme. The task of this group is to consider all matters relating to the policies of programme activities.

Furthermore, an Advisory Committee of the Regional Programme for the Eradication of Illiteracy was set up in 1987 with the task of advising the Director-General on launching the regional programme for the Eradication of Illiteracy in Africa, particularly with regard to general policy and procedures for implementing activities.

The members of the Advisory Committee of the regional programme are in charge of educational policies for the African Member States. They attend in a personal capacity and are chosen with a view to providing the committee with the necessary technical skills in the different areas of the struggle against illiteracy, particularly with regard to educational policies and planning, the extension and renovation of primary education and the development of literacy among young people and adults. The committee currently has a membership of thirty-six.

NATIONAL MECHANISMS AND STRUCTURES

In every participating Member State, the regional programme is attached to an interministerial national body (such as a committee, commission, council, etc.), whose membership is decided by the national authorities. The main duties of this body, which is chaired by a senior government official and includes senior officials and non-governmental representatives, are as follows:

- *to decide what measures are required, how to implement them and what resources will be needed;*
- *to supervise and coordinate the implementation of regional programme activities in the light of national development plans;*
- *to gather and distribute information;*
- *to support regional and sub-regional activities within the framework of the regional programme and organize them when they take place in the country concerned.*

Of the forty Member States participating in the regional programme, thirty-three have so far established national bodies. Some of these have been set up provisionally, pending the official institution of a permanent body. Those which are already operating, whether provisional or permanent, come in various guises, such as committees, commissions, councils, etc. Their membership generally extends beyond ministerial departments and covers all public and private institutions working for the elimination of illiteracy.

In order to allow interaction between regional and national structures, the technical secretariat is expected to provide a service of information exchange, especially with and among national organizations. A liaison bulletin under the title 'Alpha 2000' is published in French, English and Portuguese every two years to this effect.

REGIONAL PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

The implementation of the Regional Programme for the Eradication of Illiteracy in Africa is based on a coordinated set of activities, in the light of national and regional priorities identified in the course of co-operative activities, in six different areas of strategic action.

Before discussing these areas, it is worth noting that among the countries which have benefited from organized support activities, priority has been given to the least developed countries (LDCs), especially those with a high rate of illiteracy and low school attendance, as well as to underprivileged groups, such as women and rural dwellers. Constant attention is also paid to the distribution of activities, with a view to spreading the benefits among as many countries as possible and

ensuring balanced participation by the latter with due regard for geographical areas and language groups.

What are the six areas?

In support of the *preparation and implementation of strategies* underlying the two lines of action, namely the generalized renovation of primary education and the development of literacy programmes for young people and adults, advisory services have been supplied and technical meetings have been organized in order to help the Member States concerned to prepare national plans for the elimination of illiteracy. These services and meetings have taken the form of integrated operations, known as 'activity sequences', aimed at enhancing the national capacity for preparing and implementing integrated plans for the elimination of illiteracy. Between 1984 and 1989, these sequences involved:

- *Technical support during initial preparation of the integrated plan for the elimination of illiteracy and the establishment of national structures for the regional programme;*
- *preparation of a national information document;*
- *regional workshop;*
- *preparation of a national document for the presentation of the plan;*
- *national seminar.*

In support of the preparation and implementation of strategies, research and surveys have been conducted within the framework of the regional programme. These activities, which might come under the heading of *action research*, concern:

- the promotion of literacy for better participation by women in development;
- educational innovations;
- use of African national languages;
- changes in the employment situation and their effects on education;

- a definition of educational programmes adapted to the living conditions of rural populations.

In most cases, the results of studies and surveys conducted at different levels have been used for seminars and training workshops.

The first meeting of the Programme Advisory Committee was mainly devoted to the methodology of action research, and intensive training in this subject was proposed to support the efforts of the institutions and individuals concerned. Special emphasis was placed on the participative approach.

Staff training activities undertaken in the framework of the programme are intended both for primary education and for literacy staffs. Special attention has been given to the training and further training of multidisciplinary educators and educational planning, administration, supervisory and management staffs, as well as to the training of specialists in the preparation and production of teaching material and the evaluation of literacy and post-literacy programmes. This training is administered through seminars, workshops and study travel.

For the training of literacy staff, national, sub-regional and regional activities were concentrated on training basic staff (instructors, literacy centre leaders) and intermediate staff (supervisors), and on the training of senior staff (managers specializing in training, material production and evaluation).

Educational planning and administration training was covered by a major BREDA programme of activities, as part of the objectives pursued by the regional programme with respect to staff training and further training. The chief aim of this programme of activities is to create or develop a national capacity for educational planning and administration training, within the framework of the regional technical co-operation project for education planning and administration (COFORPA), which is described later.

With regard to the implementation of strategies for the elimination of illiteracy, activities in support of the launch of national training and research programmes for educational planning and administration were combined with specific training for national specialists from twenty-six countries as part of the sequence on integrated plans for the elimination of illiteracy. The national, sub-regional and regional activities organized in the framework of the NEIDA include seminars, workshops and inter-project visits.

The areas covered by the activities are as follows:

- *education and productive work;*
- *education for development in rural areas;*
- *administration and supervision of education systems;*
- *training and retraining of education staff;*
- *production and distribution of teaching material;*
- *use of national languages in education;*
- *teaching of sciences and technology.*

What is meant by the production and distribution of teaching material?

For the production of material required for the development of primary education and literacy and post-literacy programmes, the programme provided technical support and advisory services for the design, preparation and production of handbooks and teaching guides. This support took the form of national or sub-regional workshops for the preparation of material, and regional and sub-regional co-production and distribution workshops.

At a national level, seminars were organized on the preparation and production of teaching materials. At a sub-regional level, a seminar was held on the preparation of teaching material to be used and subsequently adapted by national teams for teaching in large classes,

and a seminar on the design, implementation and maintenance of low-cost teaching material and equipment for science and technology teaching.

For the production and dissemination of teaching material, the NEIDA highlighted efforts to reduce the cost of producing school textbooks, as well as the content and methodology of the teaching of African languages.

Exchanges and information: the programme has facilitated many exchanges, including staff, experience, material and information, with a view to helping participating countries to coordinate their activities and to promoting the joint production of material at sub-regional and regional levels.

Activities have been undertaken as part of the Horizon 2000 project for African languages, in particular to improve the teaching of mother tongues and national languages and to harmonize language terminology and publication programmes among countries with common languages. These activities should eventually lead to the publication of a reference work on the transcription and harmonization of African languages.

Awareness and mobilization: a socio-cultural undertaking! Awareness and animation activities were organized on a national level for the groups involved in the regional programme and for all those (such as professionals in the fields of education, culture and communication, senior administrators and politicians, universities and businesses) able to contribute in some way to the programme, with a view to helping the populations concerned to understand the objectives of the programme and their social, economic and cultural implications, and to stimulating their active and conscious participation in it.

The twenty-six Member States which took part in the sequence of activities designed to strengthen the national ability to prepare and implement integrated

plans for the elimination of illiteracy were offered the opportunity to organize national seminars on the encouragement of awareness, information and mobilization of integrated plans for the elimination of illiteracy.

Activities for stimulating public opinion in favour of the elimination of illiteracy focused around International Literacy Day, which is held every year on 8 September. This annual event was used to involve national committees, associations of Unesco Clubs and non-governmental organizations working in Africa in campaigns to help the public understand the nature and scope of the regional programme.

In order to provide Member countries with sufficient audiovisual material to carry out their awareness campaigns, it was suggested that the BREDA databank should be supplemented with new audiovisual material. The most useful national productions will be used to enlarge the databank.

Over forty national operational projects for the extension and renovation of primary education and the intensification of the struggle against illiteracy, financed from non-budgetary sources, are being implemented with the assistance of Unesco. The BREDA has also designed and implemented sub-regional and regional non-budgetary activities, including the COFORPA programme, the project for the use of the Arabic alphabet and the Innovation-Training-Teaching Materials Project (IFOMA).

The COFORPA Programme

It was in fact to develop national training and research capacities for educational planning and administration that a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/Unesco project on 'regional technical cooperation for educational planning and administration' (COFORPA) was launched early in 1984. This project, in which thirty-four Member States of sub-Saharan Africa took part, led to the establishment of a network consisting in a technical secretariat at the BREDA and a team led by a coordinator in each of the participating countries.

Project for the use of the Arabic alphabet in the elimination of illiteracy.

In West Africa in particular, large population groups, especially in rural and peripheral urban areas, use unofficial forms of writing on a practically daily basis. Studies on the use of non-Latin forms of writing have confirmed the existence of at least two major types: Ajami, or adapted Arabic writing, and Tifinagh (or Tifinar), a script used for the popular transcription of the Tamashek language.

In some countries of sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the Sahelian countries, Cameroon, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Comoro Islands, the use of the Arabic alphabet in the teaching of Arabic or local languages is an ancient practice, which is at present returning to favour both in school and in non-formal contexts. This is shown by the current renovation and transformation of the traditional Koranic type of school into Moslem colleges and by the transcription into Arabic characters of languages such as Pulaar, Soninke, Hausa, Wolof, Songhoy, Djerma, Swahili, Comoran, etc. used by literate groups.

IFOMA Project

When they became independent, many African countries resolutely undertook reforms to renovate their education systems, in order to adapt them better to the socio-economic requirements and legitimate aspirations of their populations. The innovations resulting from these reforms however, did not always produce the expected effects, particularly with regard to education in areas such as the environment, population or the improvement of living conditions, and the insertion of productive activities in education.

Although in most of the countries concerned teacher training accompanied this reform of the education systems, it did remain qualitatively and quantitatively below actual requirements, thus hampering the implementation of innovations. The pooling of existing experience in these fields and the exchange of ideas between specialists could lead to a substantial improvement in teaching and teacher-training programmes. This is the aim of the IFOMA project (Innovation-Training-Teaching Materials), which began in 1988. The project is financed by the Spanish government as a specific contribution to the regional programme for the eradication of illiteracy in Africa.

In the years ahead, the activities of the regional programme will be continued under Unesco's third medium-term plan (1990-1995), one of the priorities of which is the struggle against illiteracy. As part of the massive reduction of illiteracy advocated by this plan, the activities of the regional programme for the eradication of illiteracy in Africa will be supported by the 'world action plan for the massive reduction of illiteracy by the year 2000', the implementation of which is to begin in 1990, International Literacy Year.

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Adult literacy classes are held in villages in the United Republic of Tanzania by community development officers.

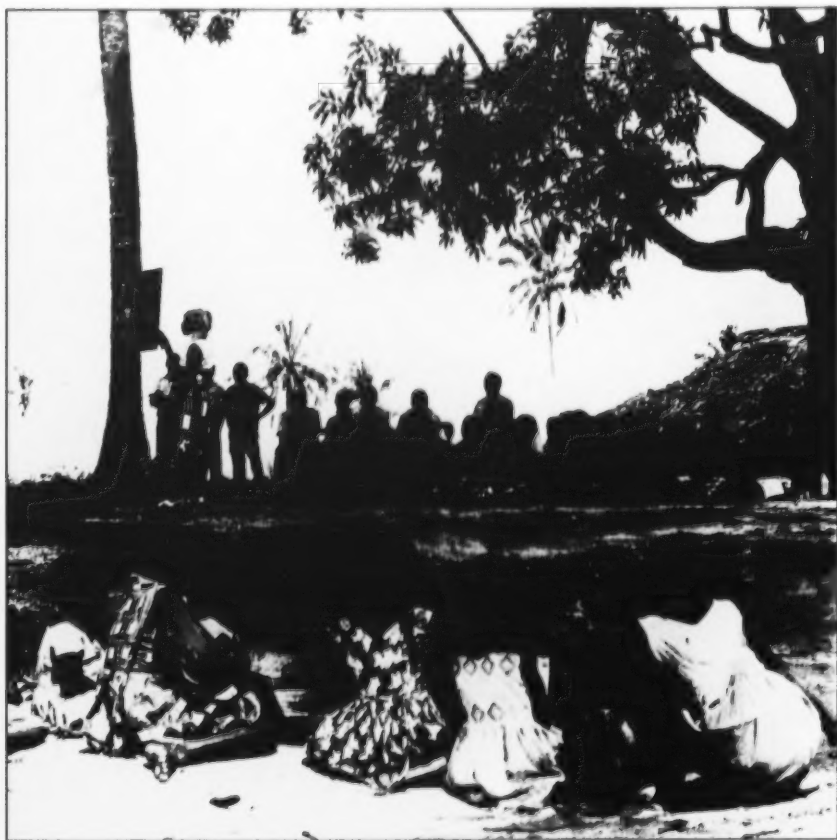


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